

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: June 14, 2018

Agenda Item: Swift Fox Conservation Strategy

Division: Wildlife **Action Needed:** Proposed

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Min

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Background:

Swift fox are a small, cat-sized fox that live on shortgrass prairies from Texas to Alberta. Swift fox were nearly extirpated from their range and were petitioned to be listed as a federally threatened or endangered species in the early 1990s. At that time, the state wildlife agencies of swift fox range states, including Montana, formed the Swift Fox Conservation Team (SFCT). The SFCT initiated basic research on distribution and habitat use of swift fox. The fox was found in several areas, and reintroductions were initiated in several other areas, often in collaboration with Tribes. Swift fox populations increased in Montana due to reintroductions just north of the border in Alberta and on the Fort Peck and Blackfeet Tribal lands. Listing was deemed unnecessary, but the SFCT continues to coordinate and implement conservation of the species. Montana's Swift Fox Conservation Strategy is tiered off the SFCT's goals and objectives. Opportunities to continue improving swift fox distribution and status appear to exist, especially in the northern portion of the species historical range where gaps appear to occur within Montana. This document is intended to promote swift fox conservation and management by formulating a statewide strategy that facilitates coordinated and effective efforts on the part of all interested organizations. The following priorities will help guide FWP and partners in conserving swift fox in Montana and contributing to the eight objectives of the SFCT. This strategy is intended to compliment the SFCT strategy while clearly prioritizing those objectives that Montana can affect. Our priorities include: 1) identify and map swift fox habitat in Montana, 2) conserve swift fox habitat and movement corridors, 3) monitor swift fox distribution and status, and 4) increase distribution of swift fox into suitable, connected habitats.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The public comment period for any proposal endorsed for public comment will run through 5 p.m., Sunday, July 15, with any final endorsement at the August 9 commission meeting.

Alternatives and Analysis: The alternative to implementing this conservation strategy is to have no contemporary strategy. This would result in less clear priorities and more difficult communications and outreach on swift fox conservation.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

FWP recommends the Commission endorse this proposed strategy to help guide swift fox conservation efforts in Montana.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Commission endorse for public comment FWP's Swift Fox Conservation Strategy as presented by the department.